



Wind farm foe quits post over e-mail flap

John Donelan, named in a Cape Wind lawsuit, admits his role in an attempt to discredit the developer.

By **JOHN LEANING**

STAFF WRITER

BOSTON - A high-ranking member of the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound abruptly resigned yesterday after he admitted he was responsible for a phony e-mail and press release designed to smear wind farm developer Cape Wind Associates.

John Donelan, the technical and research director and a founder of the Alliance, a staunch foe of the wind farm project, is being sued by Cape Wind for libel and trying to damage the business relationship the company has with other businesses and regulatory agencies.

The suit, filed yesterday in Suffolk Superior Court, accuses Donelan of being behind a phony e-mail and press release sent to the State House News Service in Boston Jan. 29.

Donelan admitted last night he that he wrote and sent the release that alleged a Cape company severed a business deal with Cape Wind because of legal problems the energy company has in Rhode Island.

At the time, officials from both Cape Wind and the company mentioned in the press release denied any such deal existed, let alone was severed.

Alliance spokesman Ernie Corrigan released a brief statement last night.

"The individual specifically accused in the complaint, John Donelan, tendered his resignation and that resignation has been accepted," said Corrigan, who declined to answer further questions about Donelan.

Donelan's resignation came only a few hours after he first learned of the lawsuit from a Times reporter. At that time, in a telephone interview, Donelan proclaimed his innocence.

"Wow! This is the first I've heard of this. I certainly didn't do anything like that," Donelan, 33, said when reached on his cellphone.

However, a few hours later, Donelan reconsidered and admitted in a telephone interview what he had done.

"I certainly acknowledge what I did. I regret casting any negative light on legitimate opposition to the project. But I let my emotions get the best of me, and didn't act in a professional manner.

"I decided the right thing to do is to acknowledge my mistake and resign," Donelan said.

Prior to taking a job with the Alliance, Donelan worked part-time at the Cape Cod Times online department from 2000 to early 2002.

Cape Wind officials hired Kroll, an international risk consulting firm based in New York City, to trace the origins of the e-mail that contained the false press release.

"When somebody does a dirty trick, when somebody creates a fraudulent press release, we wanted to find out who did this," said Jim Gordon, President of Cape Wind.

According to the court papers filed yesterday, it was Kroll's investigation that led to Donelan. Among other things Kroll specializes in gathering electronic evidence and data recovery.

The lawsuit filed by Cape Wind also pointed to other "dirty tricks" the Alliance used, including oversized maps and incorrect computer images.

Corrigan blasted Cape Wind's charge that the fake e-mail was part of "pattern of 'dirty tricks,'" saying such an allegation is "an outrageous and deliberate attempt to tar the Alliance and all opponents of the project."

Cape Wind asked for a temporary restraining order to block Donelan from destroying pertinent records and a preliminary injunction to prevent Donelan from issuing any other such e-mails.

Cape Wind is also seeking unspecified damages.

A hearing has been set for March 5 in Boston.

In the lawsuit, Cape Wind charges that Donelan knew of the wind developer's various business relationships and that he "prepared and disseminated the fraudulent press release to intentionally and maliciously interfere with Cape Wind's business and agency relationships."

Project under review

Cape Wind wants to build a 130-turbine wind farm in Nantucket Sound, the largest in the world. It is now in its third year of environmental reviews by more than dozen regional, state and federal agencies.

"We want a dialogue and debate on the merits of the project," Gordon said yesterday in a telephone interview. "We want all information on this project out in front of the public."

"Opponents that infect the debate with misinformation and dirty tricks to sway opinion do a disservice to the public and to themselves," said Gordon, who declined to say how much Kroll's services cost.

The fake press release in the e-mail alleged that a Cape-based company called DT Converting Technologies of Hyannis (two weeks earlier it had changed its name to Sencorp) had canceled a deal to manufacture wind turbine parts with Cape Wind because of concerns over the wind farm developer's legal problems in Rhode Island.

The e-mail was intended to appear as if it came from DT Converting Technologies, using the e-mail address dtctechnologies@yahoo.com. It had the Internet Protocol (IP) address of 24.34.114.133. It also listed Brian Urban, the president of Sencorp, formerly DT Converting Technologies, as the contact.

The day after the e-mail surfaced, both Urban and Cape Wind's Gordon said no deal existed and neither knew the source of the e-mailed press release.

Using one subpoena issued in Rhode Island against Yahoo, Kroll discovered that someone named Charles Farley, of Newton, had opened the e-mail account with that IP number. Another subpoena in Rhode Island filed against Comcast disclosed the identity of the subscriber with that Internet Protocol number.

Address confirmed

The answer from Comcast came back Monday: John Donelan, 27 Stoney Cliff Road, in Centerville, according to the lawsuit.

During his first interview with a Times reporter yesterday, Donelan confirmed that was his home address, but said he knew no one named Charles Farley.

Sencorp's Urban said yesterday that Gordon had alerted him to the court filing.

"I think it's the right thing for them to do," Urban said, referring to the investigation and the legal action.

"It's a very serious thing to put out false reports that could be damaging to both companies. I don't care what your position is on Cape Wind.

"Personally I think we've been victimized by this, whoever it was. I don't know. That's for the court to decide.

"I'm glad Cape Wind pursued it. There is absolutely no reason for us to get dragged into what appears to be more a political thing than anything else," Urban said.

He also said he and Gordon still have a business relationship which could develop further if the wind farm project becomes a reality.

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